



Engaging Youth as Workers in Afterschool Programs



By Sam Piha & Samantha Fasen

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sam Piha has served as founder and president of Temescal Associates since 2007. Sam began his career in 1974 as an afterschool worker, an experience that led to 13 years of classroom teaching and work as a child and family counselor and school social worker. Between 1989 and 2006, Sam managed school-based youth programs at the regional and national levels. He later founded Temescal Associates and The How Kids Learn Foundation, both dedicated to improving the quality of afterschool programs. Sam served as editor and contributing author of several important practice guides and journal articles on afterschool programming. Sam holds a master's degree in Social Welfare.

Samantha Fasen joined Temescal Associates and the How Kids Learn Foundation in 2019 and has fully embraced her work with the afterschool field. She helps to coordinate and develop marketing campaigns and multimedia elements to reach a wider audience and share with people the importance of out-of-school time and youth development.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS

Temescal Associates is dedicated to building the capacity of leaders and organizations in education and youth development who organizations, and policy makers.

The How Kids Learn Foundation (HKL) is a 501(c)(3) organization. It is dedicated to improving the effectiveness of settings that support the education and healthy development of youth. This includes schools and out-of-school time programs. The HKL Foundation provides educational and training activities that promote the capacity of organizations that support the education and healthy development of youth. Examples of activities include conferences, speaker forums, screenings of relevant films, training sessions, coaching sessions, the awarding of digital badges to acknowledge exemplar programs and the learning that happens within these settings. Activities also include the development and distribution of educational materials (papers, self-assessment tools, videos, program guides, etc.).



Source: YMCA of Greater Long Beach

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Source: [A World Fit for Kids](#)

INTRODUCTION

We know that involving older youth as workers within afterschool programs makes a great deal of sense. Engaging youth in this way helps them address their developmental tasks and personal interests. It offers experiences that build workforce and career skills, offers important leadership roles and opportunities for service, creates career pathways to professions such as teaching and social work, and ensures the program is more relevant to other youth. Work roles can include tutors, mentors, and activity assistants serving younger children in afterschool programs. Some youth also offer tutoring, mentoring, and activity workshops to their high school peers. Afterschool programs also offer work roles providing administrative support to the afterschool program. These roles include marketing, guiding tours, assisting with recruitment and outreach, taking attendance, and data entry.

“I would tell the other afterschool programs that it is an excellent idea to bring youth workers to their program because it is giving them a chance to succeed in life, and they won't be just in the streets doing nothing. Instead, they will be in the programs learning about new experiences and how to be better in the future.” – HS youth, Richmond Village Beacon Center

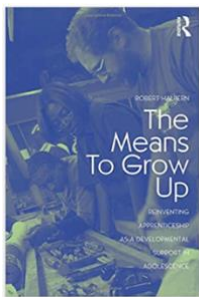
This is even more important with the COVID pandemic. A recent study entitled, ***The State of Youth Employment-Navigating the World of Work During COVID-19*** found:

1. Young people in America are struggling—they are financially strained, emotionally drained, and facing significant barriers to employment.
2. COVID-19 and the related economic recession have disrupted young people’s work lives in a myriad ways and prompted extraordinary levels of concern about the future.
3. The professional connections and supportive relationships that can help young people advance their work-related goals are out of reach for most youth.
4. Young people’s hope about their future work lives is in jeopardy.

Based on our conversations with program providers, afterschool programs can be part of the solution.

“I think it bumps me up when I need to get a job. The benefits of [working for Change Agent Productions] are getting to know people out there in your field in different states. Some of them have given me their business cards so I can call them if I’m looking for a job and even reference them in my resume.” - HS youth, Long Beach YMCA Youth Institute

DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS OF OLDER YOUTH



In his book, [*The Means to Grow Up: Reinventing Apprenticeship as a Developmental Support in Adolescence*](#), author Robert Halpern describes the developmental tasks of older youth. Halpern’s descriptions of these tasks include:

- Asserting control over their lives and the forces that affect them and their communities, while balancing preoccupation with self and commitment to others
- Beginning to think about the adult world, how it works, make sense of it, and discern their role
- Ability to carry out more complex tasks: to plan, apportion time, sustain attention and effort, gather and organize information, monitor one’s work, recognize

problems, seek help when appropriate, revise as needed. (These are all important workforce skills.)

- Forging a sense of identity and voice as someone who has power, can positively impact others, and can demonstrate real accomplishment and achievement that has meaning

According to the program leaders we spoke with, these tasks are addressed by afterschool programs that offer youth opportunities to contribute to the program as workers and helpers.

“DO IT. It might be difficult to have the youths come to work every day, as they have school work and other things to attend to, but overall their presence livens the place up. All parties will ultimately benefit.” – HS youth, Richmond Village Beacon Center

IMPORTANT TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

There are a number of important terms that are frequently used when discussing employing youth in afterschool programs. Some of these are cited below.

- ***Youth as Afterschool Workers and Helpers:*** This refers to young people providing services to other afterschool participants, which may include tutoring, mentoring, or serving as a small group leader. It may also include engaging youth in administrative duties, such as data entry, attendance tracking, or program outreach.
- ***Compensation:*** This refers to ways in which programs can acknowledge and compensate young people for their work efforts.
 - ***Wages/Hiring Youth as Afterschool Staff:*** This refers to placing youth on the payroll and paying them through the payroll system that is used for all employees of the afterschool provider.
 - ***Stipend:*** Stipend refers to an established amount of cash compensation that is awarded to young people who provide a service or complete an agreed upon task.
 - ***Incentives:*** This refers to privileges or objects of value that are awarded to young people who provide a service or complete an agreed upon task or program. Examples of incentives are listed below:
 - ***Gift Cards:*** Some programs offer youth a gift card valuing \$50-\$200.
 - ***Gift Awards:*** Some programs offer an incentive package that might include a yearbook, prom ticket, and/or graduation night ticket.
 - ***School Credits:*** Youth who work in afterschool programs may have the opportunity to fulfill their community service requirements for graduation.

- **Trips/ Outings:** Youth can earn all-expenses-paid outdoor adventure outings, such as rock climbing, rafting or year-end field trips or parties with bowling and pizza.



Source: (L) CHAMPIONS, (R) Girls Inc. of Alameda

- **Job Ladders:** This term is used to denote vertical job promotion. In afterschool programs, the ladder typically describes the progression from entry-level youth positions to higher levels of responsibility, skills, compensation, and/or authority.
- **Internships:** An intern is someone who works in a temporary position with an emphasis of on-the-job training rather than merely employment. Internships provide opportunities for students to gain experience in their field, determine if they have an interest in a particular career, create a network of contacts, and/or earn school credit. An internship may be either paid, unpaid or partially paid (in the form of a stipend).
- **Job Shadowing:** Job shadowing is a work experience option where youth learn about a job by following a competent worker as they perform his/her work duties. The job shadowing work experience is a temporary, unpaid exposure to an occupation of interest to the young person.
- **Leveraged Funding:** This refers to non-21st CCLC program funds, which may be cash or material awards from foundations, local businesses, or other sources. These funds may be used to expand the services offered through the afterschool program.

BENEFITS OF EMPLOYING YOUTH IN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

There are many benefits that come about as a result of employing youth. When asked, high school age youth cite they are most interested in opportunities to gain work experience that is meaningful and relevant to the real world, and that can translate into their ability to earn their own money. In response, a number of high school afterschool programs are increasingly engaging young people as workers and helpers within the afterschool program. Many of these programs involve the young people in a “hiring process” that mirrors the experience they can expect in the outside world (resume preparation, interviews, etc.), offers training and professional development, and/or some sort of actual compensation in return for work that is successfully completed. We’ve compiled a list below of benefits youth gain when employed in afterschool programs.

- **Leadership Skills:** The opportunity for high school age youth to serve in roles as responsible workers and helpers within the afterschool programs are designed to advance their leadership skills. Brad Lupien, Founder of CHAMPIONS, noted that some of these skills include *“gaining a sense of civic responsibility, working collaboratively with others and with a supervisor, gaining ownership over their own education, and understanding what it means to work as a professional.”*
- **Opportunities to Serve Others:**
 - **Serving Other High School Age Youth:** Many high school afterschool programs engage their older youth as mentors, tutors, and/or small group leaders within their afterschool program.



Source: YMCA of Greater Long Beach

- **Serving Elementary and Middle School Youth:** A growing number of high school afterschool programs engage youth as mentors and tutors to elementary and middle school youth.



Source: (L) A World Fit for Kids, (R) YMCA of Greater Long Beach

- ***Serving the Larger Community:*** Many afterschool programs employ youth participants and activities that are designed to benefit the surrounding community as a form of community service.
- ***Workforce Skills and Career Development:*** High school age youth are on a short pathway to early adulthood. To succeed as young adults, they need skills that will allow them to succeed in the workforce and operate independently from their parents and guardians. The need to prepare young people for the workforce is a theme that is repeatedly emphasized by the business community.
- ***For the Program: Making It More Relevant and Attractive:*** When youth are involved in planning and delivering the program, the program is viewed as more attractive and relevant to program participants. Youth who are engaged as workers within the program also serve as positive role models to other youth. In addition, youth who are involved in program delivery often bring diversity to the program and have a superior knowledge of the experiences that youth have growing up in the local community.

"I think the kids who are in this program feel more connected with us young workers. Middle school kids feel more comfortable with people who are around their age whom they can associate with. It also makes the program more fun and livelier. Young people are way more energetic and happier than older people."- HS youth, Richmond Village Beacon Center

BENEFITS: ACCORDING TO YOUTH

Why engage older youth as workers within afterschool programs? Just ask the youth. Ultimately, youth who serve as workers and helpers within afterschool programs are in the best position to talk about the benefits of these experiences.

Developing Life Skills

- *"I had serious behavior issues. Before I came here, I was a juvenile delinquent. I got in fights, I took stuff personally, and I ignored what people said. The staff here talked to me and they helped me out emotionally. They told me stuff that made me feel good about myself. So, I calmed down. My anger isn't as intense as it used to be. I owe it to Change Agent Productions for changing me." – HS youth, Long Beach YMCA Youth Institute*
- *"Being a peer mentor has been a great experience. It has helped me take on more responsibility. It has helped me in my future by planning ahead and knowing what's ahead in life." – HS youth, Azusa Think Together*
- *"Being a peer mentor made me more of a leader and less of a trouble maker." – HS youth, Azusa Think Together*
- *"Being a peer mentor has made me less shy. Now I am more open to talk to random people. Being a peer mentor changed my future because now I am thinking of maybe becoming a "tutor" in college for high-schoolers." – HS youth, Azusa Think Together*

- *"I improved my public-speaking skills. I had to step out of my box, express my feelings. Change Agent Productions really helped me to expand, especially in speaking." – HS youth, Long Beach YMCA Youth Institute*
- *"I used to be a big procrastinator, but when you are working with Change Agent Productions, you can't do that. They have deadlines; you have to make sure you keep them. So that helps me in school because I check myself." - HS youth, Long Beach YMCA Youth Institute*



Source: YMCA of Greater Long Beach

Workforce Skills and Career Development

- *"It has helped me become a better leader. I have never really taken on a leadership role before. It has also been helpful for my future because I can use it as a reference for jobs and for college applications." – HS youth, Azusa Think Together*
- *"At my job, I work alongside staff who have many years of experience of the arts. I am currently taking art classes at school, so being able to work with someone who has the same interest is fun and educational at the same time." –HS youth, Richmond Village Beacon Center*
- *"This job applies to my major. I was able to learn more skills and more about my future career. I not only learned the tools of the program, but also talked to people and companies about designing and advertising." - HS youth, Long Beach YMCA Youth Institute*

- *"I think that bringing youth to work within their afterschool program benefits the youth and the program. The youth because he/she is getting job experience. The program because it is helping the students feel closer to the program and have a role model."* – HS youth, Richmond Village Beacon Center
- *"My job was to create layouts for each of the articles that the youth created. I had to come up with a concept for the magazine cover. This made me think more innovatively in terms of giving something that the client wants."* – HS youth, Long Beach YMCA Youth Institute

Leadership And Opportunities to Serve Others

- *"Being a Peer Mentor really helped me perfect and harness my leadership abilities -- something I'll definitely need in the future "* – HS youth, Azusa Think Together
- *"I am a peer mentor therefore I know that helping others can sometimes be hard work. This experience has helped me become patient and understanding. I now understand that with a little bit of effort anything is possible. The program has deeply affected my future in many ways that I cannot yet describe. One thing that I did learn is that you need to take the time to understand that helping others is a good thing, because even though you don't get anything in return, you can always say you made a difference."* – HS youth, Azusa Think Together
- *"Serving in this role is not very stressful and it's fun. Also, it makes me feel good about myself because I know I'm helping kids with their work and they are learning something new from me, or at least learn how to do their homework better."* – HS youth, Richmond Village Beacon Center



Source: YMCA of Greater Long Beach

- *"I work as a Youth Program Assistant in a class called the Art Academy, a class within the Beacon Program. My job is to work with staff to introduce projects and lead activities. I enjoy this job because I am able to use my creativity to come up with interesting projects that encourage the students to use their imagination."* – HS youth, Richmond Village Beacon Center

- *“I do like participating as a staff assistant in the middle school program. I just love it when you have someone that looks up to you, running to you asking what class you’re helping that day. It feels good helping others. I also enjoy this role because they’re not the only ones learning from me; engaging with them helps me learn more about other things.” - HS youth, Richmond Village Beacon Center*

Cash Stipends and Wages

- *“By participating in this program, I have benefited so much. First of all, I have gained work experience. Secondly, I get to earn some money for my future college and personal expenses.” – HS youth, Richmond Village Beacon Center*

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

Based on our conversations with program providers, we offer the following recommendations for policy makers:

1. State departments of education develop and distribute clear policies and guidelines on the use of state or federal funds to engage youth as workers within the afterschool program. They should issue guidelines for the use of government funding to support high school workers within elementary and middle school programs. These guidelines should be designed to encourage, not restrict, programs from using the funds for this purpose.
2. Document promising practices being successfully used by afterschool programs and share them with those who are seeking to expand their programs’ capacity to engage youth as workers. This can be done by those who support the implementation of afterschool programs, including state afterschool networks, and those who receive technical assistance funds from government and private sources.
3. Identify supplemental funding to support career pathways to engage older youth working within afterschool settings. If needed, policy changes should be enacted to encourage access or eliminate any barriers impeding access to these funds by afterschool programs. Identifying funds is a form of technical assistance and can be done by those named in recommendation #2, above. Efforts needed to change policy can be led by afterschool advocacy organizations within your state.
4. Assist afterschool leaders in identifying and obtaining workforce and other supplemental dollars to support efforts that engage youth as workers in the afterschool setting. If needed, policy changes should be enacted to encourage access or eliminate any barriers impeding access to these funds by afterschool programs.
5. Incorporate into existing studies or identify dedicated funding to evaluate the efficacy in providing youth with work opportunities within afterschool settings. This can be achieved by local afterschool grantees who are charged with evaluating their programs, as well as larger evaluations that are funded by government or private sources.

A BRIEFING PAPER: *ENGAGING YOUTH AS WORKERS WITHIN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS*

In the words of one veteran leader of high school afterschool programs, *“We want a set of guidelines so folks know they are inside the boundaries. We need to come up with a document that lays out what is allowed and what isn’t, because we don’t want to misuse funds. Additionally, there is an interest among program leaders to know about how others are addressing these issues and the various strategies they are using.”* In response, we wrote a briefing paper on this topic to guide afterschool programs, entitled, *Engaging Youth as Workers Within High School Afterschool Programs*.

The purpose of this paper is twofold: (1) to inform afterschool program leaders and stakeholders on policies and guidelines related to employing high school age youth and the use of government funds for compensation, and to document strategies currently being used by programs to engage high school age youth through work within their afterschool programs. The paper includes discussion of policies and guidelines regarding youth employment, use of stipends and other forms of compensation. It also includes examples from actual programs and quotes from youth employed in their afterschool program. You can download this briefing paper [here](#).

